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Kurtenbach, Sabine; Rettberg, Angelika

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INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE



Understanding the relation between war economies and post-war crime

Sabine Kurtenbach^a and Angelika Rettberg^b

^aGIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Hamburg, Germany; ^bDepartment of Political Science, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia

ABSTRACT

Even when armed conflicts formally end, the transition to peace is not clear-cut. Mounting evidence suggests that it is rather 'unlikely to see a clean break from violence to consent, from theft to production, from repression to democracy, or from impunity to accountability'. The transition out of war is a complex endeavour, interrelated in many cases with other transformations such as changes in the political regime (democratisation) and in the economy (opening of markets to globalisation). In addition, in the same way as wars and conflicts reflect the societies they befall, post-war orders may replicate and perpetuate some of the drivers of war-related violence, such as high levels of instability, institutional fragility, corruption, and inequality. Thus, even in the absence of a formal relapse into war and the re-mobilisation of former insurgents, many transitional contexts are marked by the steady and ongoing reconfiguration of criminal and illegal groups and practices.

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Even when armed conflicts formally end, the transition to peace is not clear-cut. Mounting evidence suggests that it is rather 'unlikely to see a clean break from violence to consent, from theft to production, from repression to democracy, or from impunity to accountability'.¹ The transition out of war is a complex endeavour, interrelated in many cases with other transformations such as changes in the political regime (democratisation) and in the economy (opening of markets to globalisation). In addition, in the same way as wars and conflicts reflect the societies they befall, post-war orders may replicate and perpetuate some of the drivers of war-related violence, such as high levels of instability, institutional fragility, corruption, and inequality.² Thus, even in the absence of a formal relapse into war and the re-mobilisation of former insurgents, many transitional contexts are marked by the steady and ongoing reconfiguration of criminal and illegal groups and practices.

At the same time, there is variation in post-war crime and violence. In some countries, violence effectively decreases, in others it increases, in yet others it remains constant. Even within these large categories, violence and crime may assume new forms and combinations, for example, a decline in conflict-related homicides, massacres, and kidnappings, but a rise

CONTACT Sabine Kurtenbach  sabine.kurtenbach@giga-hamburg.de

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in street crime and thefts, illicit markets, corruption, sexual, and domestic violence, or environmental crime.³

This collection explores the links between different manifestations of violence during and following war, as well as variation in form and intensity. Also referred to as the 'crime-conflict nexus'⁴ – understood as the extent to which armed conflict patterns and mechanisms shape post-war crime.⁵ The implications for international peace, cooperation, and development are significant as post-war crime, violence, and corruption produce insecurity. They endanger or undermine trust in fragile and incipient reform processes or they divert funds necessary for reconstruction and development either to private pockets or to different priorities such as to enforce security. The direct or indirect links and interactions between wartime and post-war violence are rarely visible and obvious. The same holds true for the relations between armed actors, criminal actors, and the state.⁶ This calls for a connected understanding of conflict and post-war periods as well as for the design of policies and monitoring mechanisms bridging both.

Post-war crime and war economies

This collection focuses on an understudied factor in shaping post-war crime: war economies. This encompasses the organisation and development of a society's legal and illegal resource flows in support or as a result of conflict and violence. In recent decades there has been a vibrant debate on war economies as a major explanatory factor for the onset, continuation, and transformation of dynamics of violence.⁷ The link between war economies and post-war crime has been analysed mostly in relation to three aspects: (1) persistently low levels of state capacities regarding the regulation of violence and the provision of public goods; (2) the ongoing control of licit and illicit flows of resources and weapons by non-state armed actors; and (3) changing patterns of violence.⁸ Of course, these three elements are connected, suggesting a relationship of mutual reinforcement.

Institutional weakness

Regarding institutional weakness, it has been widely documented that both the formation of grievances and of illegal organisations is strongly related to the opportunity provided by domestic and international institutions incapable of, or unwilling to, respond to structural inequality and illicit markets. At the same time, it has been shown that conflict and crime further weaken existing state and development institutions.⁹ This is reflected in the growth of military budgets to the detriment of investments in health, education, and infrastructure, as well as inertia in policy approaches or in practices developed during and in function of war. These practices are difficult to modify and adapt to changing circumstances. Not surprisingly, the literature on building sustainable peace tends to put state-building front and centre.¹⁰

Several articles in this collection illustrate the legacies of war-related institutional adaptations and particularities for post-war crime. Jayasundara-Smits,¹¹ for example, illustrates the links between war economies and current crime in Sri Lanka. Similarly, Themnér¹² focuses on former command structures and their relation to the ongoing post-war drug trade in Liberia. Nussio¹³ addresses ongoing institutional incapacity as a source of recruitment for members of new criminal groups in Colombia. Finally, Cockayne¹⁴ provides a historical

perspective to demonstrate that post-cold war conflicts have brought little that is new despite some of the claims made in the 'new war' debate.¹⁵ A look at the evolution of the Sicilian mafia illustrates how weak institutions and illicit markets remain mutually dependent for generations.

Flow of licit and illicit resources

Weak resource governance not only accounts for the onset of violence, but also for the resilience of crime after war's end.¹⁶ Illicit markets thrive in and fuel conflict contexts, but also remain a challenge once formal fighting has ceased. They are difficult to dismantle, enduringly lucrative, and at the disposal of new actors once the previous controllers have demobilised. In addition, most illicit markets escape the control of and weaken domestic institutions, due to their shifting patterns as well as to international networks of weapons, drugs, and other resources. Demand arises mainly from beyond national borders. It has been shown that different forms of domestic crime and war-related violence depend on and are shaped by participation in international networks, as globalisation blurs the lines between the domestic and the international.¹⁷ However, attention to the role of international markets, governments, and networks is often only explored during war, and ceases at war's end. Yet, integration into international networks may intensify the impact of illicit resources on domestic stability, especially in the volatile contexts of transitional countries.¹⁸

In this collection, Vorrath's¹⁹ text on illicit economies and post-war crime in Liberia and Sierra Leone illustrates illicit markets' resilience and capacity to adapt, causing new sources of instability and unrest. Nussio²⁰ points to the ongoing drug trade as a critical point of vulnerability for the recently demobilised members of the Colombian FARC guerrilla. Massé and Le Billon²¹ complement the look at the drug trade with a focus on illegal gold mining, also in Colombia. Kuhn²² tackles the seemingly intractable issue of land, and asks whether large-scale land acquisitions stimulate or dampen prospects of peace in post-war contexts.

Of course, the question of resources cannot be limited to tradeables alone and crime is not necessarily violent.²³ Corruption, or the use of public resources for private good, has also been analysed under the lens of war economies contributing to post-war crime. In any context, corruption erodes confidence, deviates resources, and affects institutional strengthening.²⁴ In the aftermath of war, these effects are a result of the windows of opportunity provided by the authority gap between the retreat of illegal groups and the slow and uncertain presence of state authorities, as well as by the inflow of domestic and international resources in institutionally weak contexts. This compromises the stability and progress of post-war societies. Le Billon²⁵ has pointed to the importance of paying attention to conflict-related institutional deficits taking more subtle forms than physical violence. At the same time, some authors have shown that certain forms and levels of corruption may preserve needed structures of authority and promote bargaining and power-sharing conducive to the kind of stability required for implementing peacebuilding related policy.²⁶ In this collection, Le Billon²⁷ illustrates how post-war corruption reflects practices developed under the auspices of war-related institutions and further feeds the perpetuation and adjustments of post-war crime. Cockayne²⁸ contributes a historical perspective on the role of Sicilian mafias in providing government services.

Changing patterns of violence

When conflicts end, war-related practices such as forced displacement, massacres, and kidnappings give way to petty crime, domestic violence, and gangs.²⁹ In part, this may be a question of perception: during war, domestic and international authorities and citizens privilege attention to the more heinous crimes and, once war subsides, other practices gain increased public consideration. From this perspective, petty crime awareness is a post-war 'privilege' as other forms of collective organised violence decrease. However, as documented in many transitional countries, the void produced by demobilising armed structures in addition to the ongoing weakness of state institutions is, in fact, filled by new organisations and members, including drug-related gangs, which thrive in the unstable political and social contexts that mark the aftermath of war. Vorrath's text³⁰ on the role of the drug trade in transforming post-war crime in Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as Themnér's³¹ contribution on Liberia, illustrate the vagaries of this process.

Conclusion

None of these realities is specific either to the post-cold war setting or to particular regions in the world, so the articles included in this collection apply a comparative and historically grounded perspective in addressing these three aspects and in identifying the mechanisms linking periods, actors, practices, states, and society. Such an approach suggests the overarching reality of path dependence, as the legacies of war and violence dynamics interact with other political, economic, and social dynamics well beyond the formal end of war. Hence, a focus on war economies and their transformation or the lack thereof is essential to tackle the related social, political, and economic problems. Otherwise this is reflected in persistent institutional weakness and the influence of, and co-optation by, illicit actors, in state responses to violence and non-state armed actors; in the ongoing interaction with international markets for crime; in the reality of organisational learning and adaptation; and in the cultural propensity and historical embeddedness of practices related to violence before, during, and after war.

The message of the documents contained in this special issue that war economies do not disappear after the end of war but rather adapt and change to survive could be interpreted as fatalistic premonitions of inescapable disaster. Nothing further from our intentions. Rather, we seek to acknowledge the sizable difficulties involved in transitions and the many legacies wars have on societies for years after formally ending. As has also been proposed by Bosetti, Cockayne, and de Boer,³² our purpose is to point at the risks involved in what we perceive as a futile compartmentalisation of duties and responsibilities among institutions involved in facilitating transitions between war and post-war periods, as well as a division of labour within academia between scholars studying conflict and those studying crime. The contributions to this collection make a powerful statement in favour of identifying practical and conceptual links between war and post-war contexts, as well as mechanisms that should be understood in greater detail and integrated more effectively into peacebuilding and development practice. Indeed, the emerging academic and policy related debate on the links between war and post-war developments points towards a promising future research agenda. This agenda on the transformation out of war needs to address the dismantlement of war economies in a systematic manner.

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Notes on contributors

Sabine Kurtenbach is a political scientist and senior research fellow at the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, where she is General Editor of the GIGA Focus series. Her research has focused on peace processes, post-war societies, youth, and institutions with a specific regional focus on Latin America but also beyond. Related publications: 2017: "Institutional Reforms and Peacebuilding: Change, Path-Dependency and Societal Divisions in Post-War Communities", Abingdon/New York: Routledge (co-edited with Nadine Ansorg). 2014: "Post-war Violence in Guatemala: A Mirror of the Relationship between Youth and Adult Society", in: *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 8, 1, 119-133. 2013: "The "Happy Outcomes" May Not Come At All – Post-war Violence in Central America", in: *Civil Wars*, 15, 1, 105-122.

Angelika Rettberg earned her PhD from Boston University. She is an associate professor at the Political Science Department at Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá – Colombia), where she leads the Research Program on Armed Conflict and Peacebuilding. She is also a Global Fellow at the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO). Her research has focused on the private sector as a political actor and, specifically, on business behaviour in contexts of armed conflict and peacebuilding. Other topics are the political economy of armed conflict and peacebuilding, such as the relationship between legal resources, armed conflict, and crime in several Colombian regions as well as the dynamics of transitional justice. Related publications: 2016: "Golden Opportunity, or a New Twist on the Resource-Conflict Relationship: Links Between the Drug Trade and Illegal Gold Mining in Colombia", in *World Development*, Vol. 84. pp. 82-96 (with Juan Felipe Ortiz-Riomalo). 2016: "Need, Creed, and Greed: Understanding How and Why Business Leaders Focus on Issues of Peace", in *Business Horizons* Vol.59, Issue 5, September–October, pp. 481–492. 2016: "Reconciliation: A Comprehensive Framework for Empirical Analysis", in *Security Dialogue*, Vol.47, Issue 6; December 2016, pp. 517 – 540 (with Juan Esteban Ugarriza).

Notes

1. Keen, "War and Peace", 10.
2. Licklider, "Obstacles to Peace Settlements"
3. See Darby, *Violence and Reconstruction*; Autesserre, "Peacetime Violence"; and Krause, "Hybrid Violence"
4. de Boer and Bosetti, "The Crime-conflict 'Nexus'"

5. Cockayne, "Chasing Shadows"; Gutiérrez Sanín, "Criminal Rebels?"; Jespersen, "Development Engagement with Organised Crime"; and Kalyvas, "How Civil Wars Help Explain"
6. Kurtenbach, "The 'Happy Outcomes' May Not Come at All"
7. Ballentine and Nitzschke, *Profiting from Peace*; Le Billon, "The Political Ecology of War"; Liebenberg, Haines, and Harris, "A Theory of War Economies"; Pugh and Cooper, *War Economies in a Regional Context*; and Ross, "What do we know about Natural Resources"
8. Andreas and Wallman, "Illicit Markets and Violence"; Newman and Richmond, "Peace Building and Spoilers"; Pugh, *Regeneration of War-torn Societies*; Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes"; and Suhrke and Berdal, *The Peace In Between*.
9. Gates et al., "Institutional Inconsistency and Political Instability"; and Rodrik, Subramanian, and Trebbi, "Institutions Rule, The Primacy"
10. Paris and Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding*.
11. Jayasundara-Smits, "Lost in Transition"
12. Themnér, "Commanding Abuse or Abusing Command"
13. Nussio, "Ex-combatants and Violence in Colombia".
14. Cockayne, "Can Organised Crime Shape"
15. Kaldor, *New & Old Wars*; and Kaldor, "In Defence of New Wars"
16. Le Billon, *Fuelling War*; and Ross, "What have we Learned"
17. Cockayne, *Hidden Power*.
18. UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime*; and UNODC, "Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa"
19. Vorrath, "What Drives Post-war Crime"
20. See note 13 above.
21. Massé and Le Billon, "Gold Mining in Colombia"
22. Kuhn, "Large-scale Land Acquisitions"
23. Andreas and Wallman, "Illicit Markets and Violence"
24. Cheng and Zaum, *Corruption and Post-conflict?*
25. Le Billon, "Buying Peace or Fuelling War"; Le Billon, "Corrupting Peace? Peacebuilding"
26. Belloni and Strazzari, "Corruption in Post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo"; Goodhand, "Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace?"; and Zabyelina and Arsovska, "Rediscovering Corruption's Other Side"
27. Le Billon, "Peacebuilding and White-collar Crime"
28. See note 14 above.
29. Experiences in post-war Central American and West-Africa provide evidence for these developments; see Cruz, "Criminal Violence and Democratisation"; Neumann, "(Un)Exceptional Violence(s) in Latin America"; Liberia Armed Violence Assessment, *Reading between the Lines*; and Themnér, "Former Military Networks and the Micro-Politics"
30. See note 19 above.
31. Themnér, "Commanding Abuse or Abusing Command"
32. Bosetti, Cockayne, and de Boer, "Crime-Proofing Conflict Prevention, Management"

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